ER AMERICAS



PHOTOGRAPHS AND TEXT BY

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INTRODUCTION BY
ALAN RIDING

OTHER AMERICAS
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OTHER AMERICAS

INTRODUCTION

The borders of the Other Americas can be found on no map, yet they are drawn in such sharp religious, cultural, economic, and political lines that it is impossible to ignore the moment of entry into this world. It is, quite simply, the world of the powerless, of those who from the barren sierras and deserts of Latin America watch as their nations change without them. And it is this world, held together by birth, family, and death, and by myth, faith, and fatalism, that Sebastião Salgado has penetrated. The result is an extraordinary book of both intimacy and scope. Through the pain and dignity of individual lives in a neglected and often despised part of the Americas, Salgado has traced the source of much of the magic and mystery that envelops this continent.

This was his objective. He shares the romantic idea of so many of the region's artists and intellectuals that, even more than a place, there exists a concept called "Latin America." But to capture it, he did not seek out the images evoked by José Martí's poetry and Simón Bolívar's speeches, or the roots of the language, religion, and culture that are common to the area. Instead, he turned to those millions of Latin Americans who, albeit separated by tens of thousands of miles, by mutually unintelligible languages, and even by different sets of beliefs, in fact have very similar lives. They are the Indian peoples of Latin America who for centuries have taken refuge from "civilization" in the mountains that stretch almost without interruption from Mexico's Sierra Madre to Chile's Cordillera. And they are the mixed-blood peons and settlers of Brazil's arid Northeast, whose history and environment may be different but whose lives are no less shaped by misery and mysticism. Together, they form the pool of traditional values and rituals in which Salgado's sharp image of Latin America is reflected.

It is a simple idea, but once I had studied this book, I saw a world that was highly familiar to me in a different way. Salgado has purposely presented the photographs without explanatory captions, provoking the imagination to wander and speculate. Yet gradually, through the mood he creates, the homogeneity of the Other Americas emerges. He was also tempted to omit the country and date of each photograph to underline the irrelevance of both national boundaries and the passage of time. Yet the point is still made by the recognition that faces from, say, Mexico and Ecuador are interchangeable. Salgado then goes further, enabling us to view this world through the eyes of those who occupy it. To achieve this, to capture an unrushed world, to gain the necessary acceptance and even indifference of his subjects, he could not hurry. He first told me of his project in Mexico City five years ago, when it was already four years old. He then traveled north to the Tarahumara Indians of Chihuahua and south to the Zapotecs of Oaxaca and emerged weeks later with just ten of the photographs that appear in this book. And through trips like this, he came to isolate the timeless quality that unifies this unchanging world.

In every material sense, the "other Americans" are of course poor and vulnerable. From the time of the Conquest through every generation to this day, they have been driven or have fled to where the land is least fertile and least coveted. They farm corn, potatoes, and yucca to survive, but they have neither surplus to sell to the outside world nor money to buy from it. And if their communal land suddenly takes on value, if their forest home comes within reach of loggers, it is immediately invaded and occupied. In some cases, as in Bolivia and Chile today and Mexico and Peru before them, their silent hills are found to contain valuable metal ores which they are then called on to mine. But their principal contact with "development" remains the train that carries away the wealth. In Colonial times, these resources built palaces in Madrid and Lisbon; later, they were to spawn bureaucracies and bourgeoisies; today, they pay off debts to banks in New York and London.

Politically too, these communities are irrelevant. Where lucky or, above all, isolated, they may still enjoy some form of self-government under the guidance of elders or shamans, but the influence of such organizations extends no further than each community. Trucks collect villagers on election days when local bosses or regional *caciques* provide instructions on how they should vote, but they neither raise their voices nor expect to be heard. Their births go unrecorded, their lives are uneventful, and their deaths go unnoticed. Often, they are caught in political battles that are not theirs, either pressed into service as soldiers – the same Indian faces look out from under helmets throughout Latin America – or, as occurred successively in Colombia, Guatemala, El Salvador, Nicaragua, and Peru, recruited into joining leftist guerrilla movements. And they are invariably the losers, wrenched and then alienated from their communities as they are indoctrinated into military loyalty or, no less painfully, displaced from their land by the repression that automatically follows the outbreak of insurgency.

Yet the reason that this book is not a catalogue of despair is that it captures the cultural and spiritual dimensions that make life in the Other Americas tolerable. Salgado does not try to romanticize his subjects, and he does not dwell on the exotic folklority of Indian life that so appeals to Westerners, but he cannot hide his own nostalgia for the unaffected simplicity of rural life and the profound mysticism that sustains it. He has chosen not to focus on those "other" Other Americas of rapidly multiplying urban slums, but he implicitly questions whether the open door of migration brings any relief. One disturbing photograph of vultures hovering over scavengers in some urban garbage dump – this too could be in any large city, although it is in fact Fortaleza in Brazil's Northeast suffices to dramatize his argument.

The reality is of course that, since World War II, tens of millions of people have opted to leave the quiet of the countryside, either "expelled" by drought, disease, or political strife or drawn by dreams broadcast over transistor radios. Some, like the half-million Guatemalan Indians who travel each winter with their wives and families to the Pacific lowlands to pick coffee and cotton or to cut sugarcane, do so in order to survive in their villages during the rest of the year. But for most, migration is a one-way experience, because those who break with their families and communities, their traditional language, clothes, and food, change too much to be able to return. And they now crowd the "lost cities" of the Mexican capital, the "young towns" of Lima or the hillside *favelas* of Rio de Janeiro. They find low-paying jobs or learn to subsist off the streets ;

in time their children even go to school and a land-title may be issued for the plot on which they are squatting, yet violence, promiscuity, and loneliness trap them in a process of social disintegration that gradually erodes the values that once gave them identity and security.

With each new generation, the temptation to head for the cities is renewed. But with each new access road, the outside world also reaches deeper into the sierras and deserts. In a sense this is not new – from the arrival of the first missionary, their isolation has been broken. And today, standing alongside the stone churches built centuries ago by Franciscans, Dominicans, and Jesuits are the wooden chapels built this century by Baptists, Seventh-Day Adventists, Jehovah's Witnesses, and an array of fundamentalist sects. But the pace of change is accelerating, and the latest assault by consumerism and communications is still more difficult to turn back : the trucks carrying bottles of soda and canned food become the reason for building a road; and the arrival of a television signal justifies the expense of acquiring a community's first electrical generator.

Irrevocably shrinking and retreating, the Other Americas are nonetheless able to survive precisely because their hidden resources remain strong. And these run like invisible threads through this book. The profound religiosity of Latin America, both the hope and fatalism that it inspires, is part of the unbroken chain of magic, superstition, and spirits that has long filled this world. Christianity, absorbed and adapted to suit different needs and traditions, lives comfortably alongside the worship of deer, jaguars, trees, the rain, or the sun. Masks, music, and costumes still give meaning to religious dances and rituals. Nature itself, through the vast emptiness of the Andes and the Sierra Madre or the grandiose desolation of the deserts, adds to this spirituality and introspection. And then there is the constant presence and easy acceptance of death, which carries away young and old alike. In endlessly repeated lives, the natural order of things need not be challenged.

In black and white, Salgado's photographs capture the alternating light and darkness of skies and lives, the harshness and cruelty that coexist with tenderness and sentimentality. Salgado has sought out a lost corner of the Americas and he has made it a prism through which the entire continent can be viewed. A philosophy of life is caught in a look ; an entire way of life is frozen in a moment. He has created a record, he has preserved a world, and he has celebrated its isolation. In doing so, he has also aimed to provoke disturbing and contradictory emotions. In this too, he has succeeded magnificently.

Alan Riding.

PREFACE

When I began this body of work in 1977, after some years of adventures in Europe and Africa, my only desire was to return to my beloved land, to this Latin America so dear and profound, to my Brazil, which a somewhat forced exile obliged me to leave.

I would dream of this enchanted continent, with all the fantasy inherited from a land of incredible tales. I would let my imagination drift through the immense mountains, green and fleshy, which form the walls of the Andean highlands; through the unfinished wars fought by legendary peasants and miners, almost revolutionary ghosts; through the indescribable mysticism of the *sertão,* the Brazilian upland, with its leather-clad men and their ferocious fight for survival in the lands so arid, so poor, and so much the spiritual refuge of a whole country. I would dream of the Sierra Madre and its dense fog, its magical mushrooms and peyotes, its dead so alive in the imagination of the living: that place where it is so difficult to know if we are of this world or another, where death is the inseparable sister of everyday life.

Equipped with a whole arsenal of chimeras, I decided to dive into the most concrete of unreality in this Latin America, so mysterious and suffering, so heroic and noble.

The seven years spent making these images were like a trip seven centuries back in time to observe, unrolling before me, at a slow, utterly sluggish pace – which marks the passage of time in this region – all the flow of different cultures, so similar in their beliefs, losses, and sufferings. I haunted the universality of this world apart, traveling from the torrid coastal lowlands of Northeastern Brazil to the mountains of Chile, to Bolivia, Peru, Ecuador, Guatemala, and Mexico.

Wherever you looked that day, all you saw was the little black box the children carried – and nearby, the old lady, watching. At morning mass, at the cemetery, she was there, sitting in the first row. Don Gabicho, the officiating priest, praying for the souls, couldn't move his eyes from the children, the old lady, and the little black box. After lunch, at the annual procession for the dead, one could see the little black box and its cortege. And later that night, at the ball of the parish house of San Vicente Nautec, the little box danced with the children – the old lady present, still observing the movement of the groups of children and the joyous handling of the black object, going from hand to hand through the family.

Very early the next day, one of the boys came to ask Don Gabicho if it would be possible to say mass at his grandmother's house. At eleven o'clock we went with the priest to the house pointed out by the little messenger, and there we found the old lady from the previous day, who begged the priest to say the office of the dead in honor of a dear one in her family.

The priest, a little startled, told her he didn't know there had been a death that night in San Vicente Nautec. Perplexed by the priest's misunderstanding, the old lady reached into the little black box and brought out some human bones. She put them on the table, begging the priest at the same time to dedicate the mass to her beloved husband, whom she had kept inseparably with her, inside that little box, for seven years after his death.

For almost sixty years Frei Damião has crisscrossed the Northeast region of Brazil, preaching the elementary principles of love, truth, and justice.

His methods have changed little throughout his evangelical crusade : he appears in a small town, where he will stay for a week, starting his daily activities at four in the morning with a joyous procession. Mass is celebrated at six o'clock, and confession starts at eight, followed by sermons for the women, then for the men, in a tempo that seems almost infernal for a man so saintly and so old. And once the work is over in one town, he will turn up in another, a thousand miles away, like a point of light amid the shadowy poverty and dense mysticism of the vast Brazilian interior.

At the town of Palestina, Frei Damião is strongly protected during the procession by a group of bodyguards, who watch over him tirelessly, guarding him from the fanatical and devoted old women who often try, at these moments of intense agitation, to pluck some hairs from the head of the eighty-year-old evangelist, sure that after his death the strands will by themselves be capable of miracles.

According to regional rumors, the Capuchins, Frei Damião's order, have already given permission to the city of Caruaru to raise a statue, an immense statue, after the priest's death. If such a project materializes, Caruaru will no doubt become a new center of pilgrimage as important as Canindé, Monte Santo, Bom Jesus da Lapa – and will compete with the mecca of the Northeast, Juazeiro do Norte.

In Juazeiro do Norte, at the beginning of the century, there lived Padre Cícero, who was widely celebrated for his popular apostleship, much in the same way as Frei Damião. After his death, this city became one of the largest centers of pilgrimage in the country.

In hope of miracles, the sick and disabled of all corners of the Northeast are carried to Juazeiro. Even some of the dead are brought to be buried closer to Padre Cícero. As the poverty is profound, the local churches have devised an imaginative service of renting coffins for wakes and for taking bodies to the cemetery. At the time of interment, the body is removed from the coffin, which will serve this way an infinite number of times.

This scheme presents two advantages : the first economical, and a second one more practical for the dead, who are freed from the enclosure of the coffin and will thus have less difficulty finding their way to heaven.

It is also for the purpose of helping them find the way to heaven that children are buried with their eyes open – otherwise they might blindly drift in limbo forever, never able to reach the true home of the Lord.

In Jeremoabo, Frei Damião celebrates the wedding of young Maria Eugênia, who owns nothing but the profound experience of her twenty-eight years of age. On her stern face show the marks of a life of hardship.

Here, dignity and poverty ride on the same horse. The struggle for survival is very difficult, and man, a hard beast, faces it from birth till death, always with signs of resolution – fighting the barrenness of the land, the long droughts, and the still-feudal agrarian structure.

Don Rafael and Antonio Pérez pointed to the track made by the giant snake that formed the bed of the stream called Culebra. We were at Atillo, a small town on a spur of the Andes, just where these gigantic mountains fall abruptly into the Amazon forest.

Atillo, about thirteen thousand feet high, is an extremely cold and humid place, due to the meeting of mountain and tropical climates. A bit above the small town there is the lake of Atillo, where the snake was born. One day, the evil beast, which certainly had a pact with the devil, left its birthplace to come to the town of Don Rafael's grandparents. In less than two hours the snake devoured all two hundred of the town's cows. As soon as the catastrophe began, the population panicked and took refuge in the surrounding mountains. The *culebra loca* ("mad snake"), after destroying everything, decided to abandon the region. The weight of its enormous, slithering body formed the bed of the sinuous stream. Dozens of miles north, the awesome animal was attacked by Indians armed with large torches. In order to avoid the trap, the reptile climbed the highest mountain in the region. Still pursued by the assailants, it decided to penetrate the earth, and from the hole where its body disappeared the volcano Chimborazo was formed.

During the time I spent in Atillo, I passed the nights talking with the people. I was the first foreigner to set foot in that community so deeply marked by its isolation from the rest of the world. This generated immense curiosity among the population for many things new and foreign to them.

In these nocturnal conversations I often veered off into discourses on themes linked to their own world of cultural reference – the Holy Land, Spain, Mexico, the legends about the Moors, etc. One night they asked me to talk about the Amazon River. I proceeded to explain that this huge volume of water would reach the Atlantic Ocean after running through more than three thousand miles

of jungle, but that at the beginning of its course and for a long way, the river is called Marañón. The Marañón is formed by other rivers, such as the Pastoza, which in turn is formed by yet others, such as the Cebadas. I made a point of telling them that one of the most important tributaries of the Cebadas was – precisely – their own stream, the Culebra.

After this night something changed in their behavior toward the stream. Without meaning to, I had aroused in them a feeling of pity for "this little water," which they all had believed ended its trip right here in the Pacific, just on the other side of this ridge of the Andes. But now the community discovered that its poor little stream had to travel an incredible distance, exposed to all the dangers of the jungle, in the end to flow into an alien ocean, of such ill repute.

The Saraguros are an indigenous group very distinct from any other in Ecuador. Tradition says that the Saraguros are of Bolivian origin. Because of their independent and rebellious nature, they were transferred by the Incas, in pre-Columbian times, from the Bolivian highlands to the southern region of Ecuador.

My friend Concepción, better known in San Lucas de los Saraguros as Supo, is one of the most profound people I have ever met. Moreover, he is the personification of moral integrity. All in San Lucas love to escape the hardships of the world on the weekends, using the collective transport of alcohol ; all, that is, except Supo, who maintains the local church, cleaning the big sacred paintings and the saints in the sacristy. Almost every Sunday he receives the teachings of the Bible through the readings of Sister Octavia Ramírez, mother superior of the Lauritas sisters of Loja.

Because of his mystical revelations, Supo used to tell me, very confidentially, that the days of humanity were numbered and that all of the Saraguro people were blind, for they were unable to read the emanations of light in the heavens, signs of the coming end of the world.

Once, when we were returning from a long walk to another village, Supo took advantage of our isolation and the darkness of the night, to make a demand of me : I must tell the people in heaven of his good behavior in this vale of tears, for he was absolutely sure I was an emissary of the divinities, sent to his village to photograph and describe.

Sebastião Salgado.

Brazilian-born Sebastião Salgado was trained as an economist. It was after a number of trips to Africa for his employer, the International Coffee Organization, that he decided to become a photojournalist.

He began his career in 1973 at the age of twenty-nine, first reporting on the famine in Niger and on the condition of migrant workers in Europe. Since then he has worked for a wide variety of magazines, newspapers, and humanitarian organizations, reporting on events such as the return of democracy to Portugal and the independence of Angola, and, recently, on the devastation wrought by the famine in Africa. His extensive documentation of the latter, done in conjunction with the French relief group "Médecins sans Frontières", was published in France in 1986 as a book, *Sahel : L'Homme en Détresse (Sahel : Man in Distress).*

Throughout his career, Sebastião Salgado has returned repeatedly from his current home in Paris to his native Latin America to photograph. The images in this book are the result of these many expeditions, undertaken at his own initiative over a seven-year period. In 1983 he received the W. Eugene Smith Award in Humanistic Photography for this work while it was still in progress.

Sebastião Salgado is married and has two children. He is a member of the photographic agency Magnum Photos.

This book is dedicated to Lélia, Juliano, and Rodrigo – for her help and for their understanding during all of the times I have been away.

I would like to deeply thank all of the friends who have generously provided their support and suggestions during the course of this work, especially :
all of the people whom I photographed, the staff of Magnum Photos, Daniel Arnault, Gabriel Bariga (Gabicho), Maurice Coriat, Josef Koudelka, Célio Lyra, Claude Nori, Pierre Olivieri, Napoleão Pires Sabóia, Leonidas Proaño, Fred Ritchin, and Agnès Sire.







Mexico 1980





Ecuador 1982



Bolivia 1983





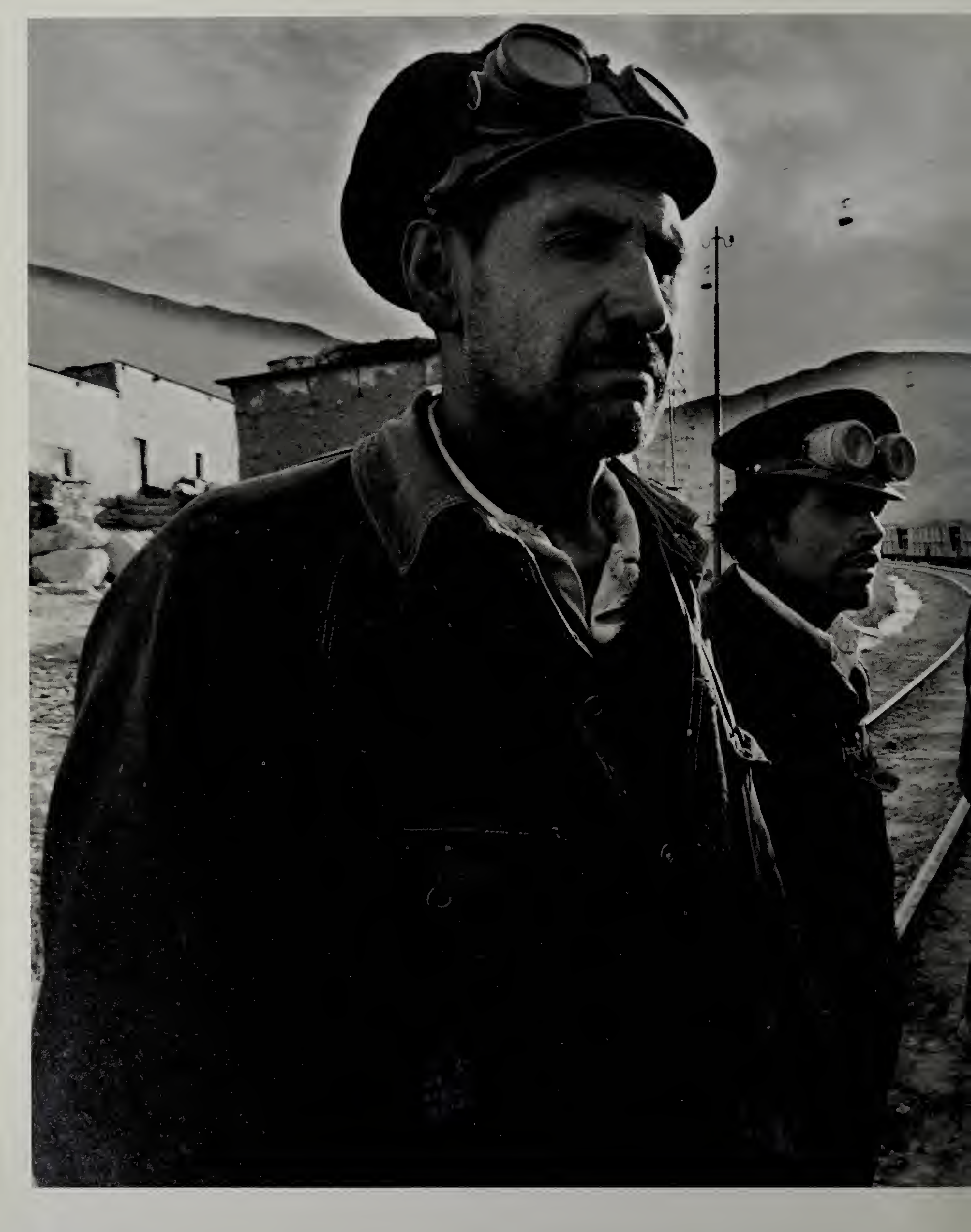
Ecuador 1982





Bolivia 1977







Bolivia 1977

Brasil 1981


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Brasil 1983





Ecuador 1982





Brasil 1983

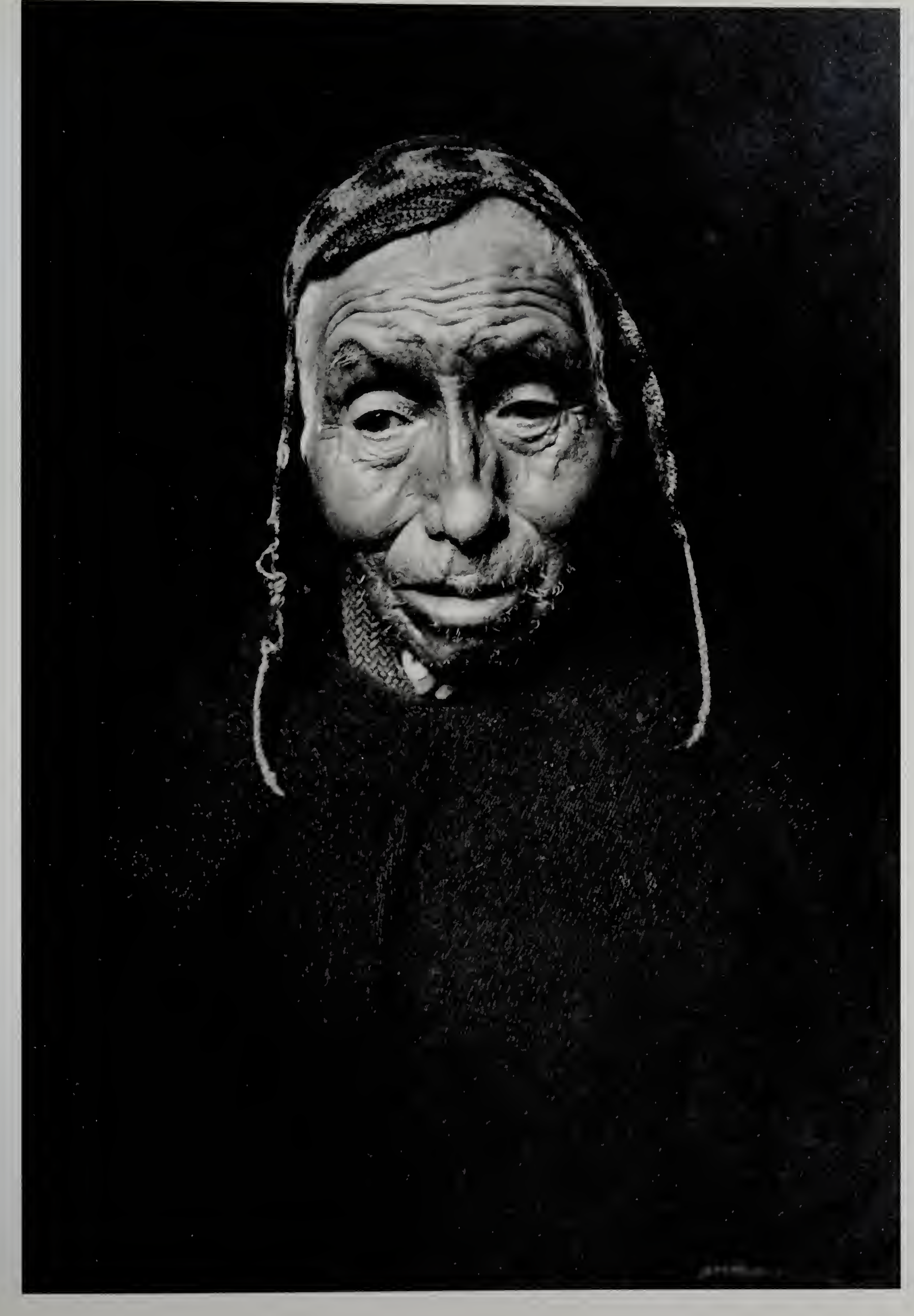






Mexico 1980

Peru 1977







Mexico 1980





Ecuador 1982

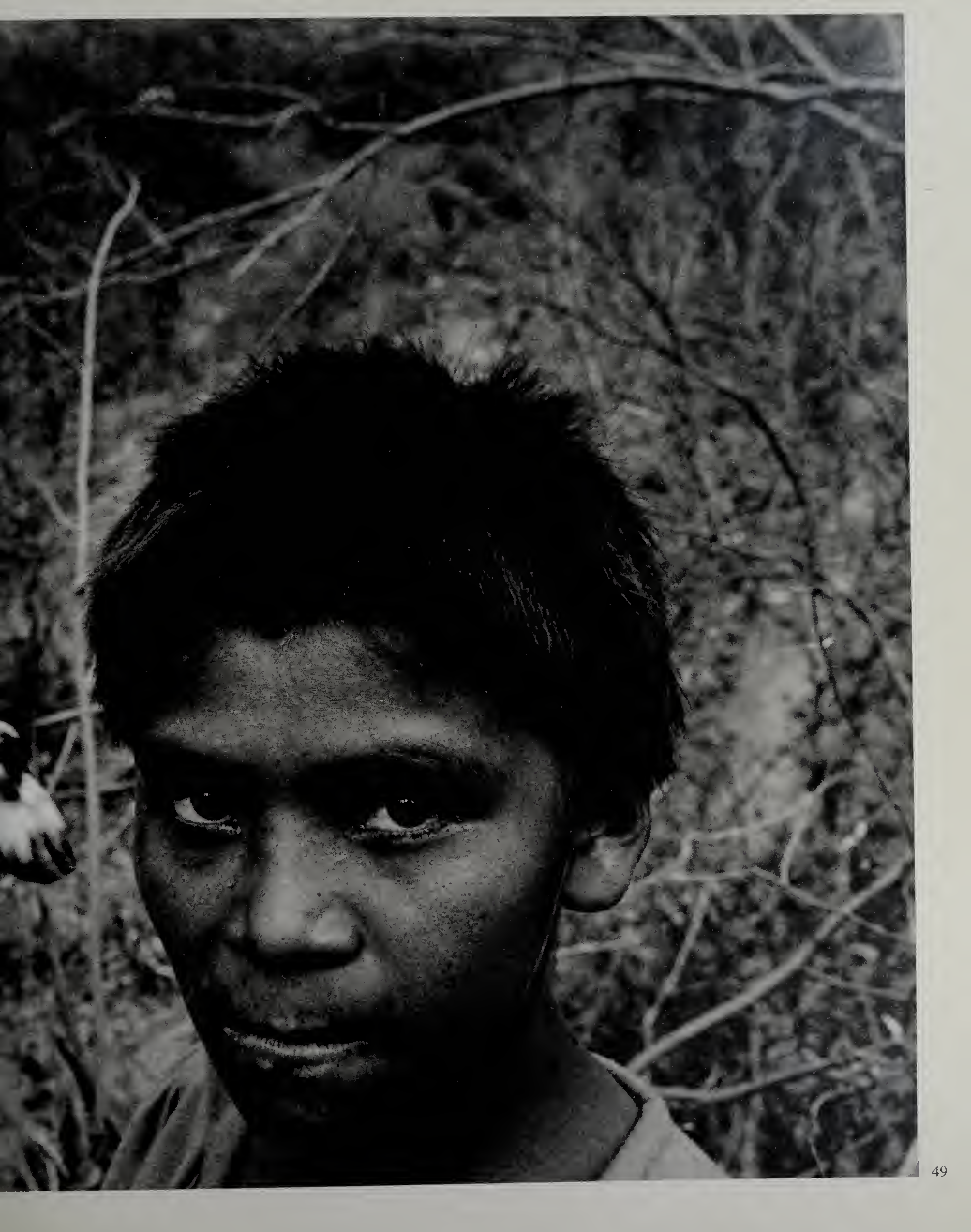




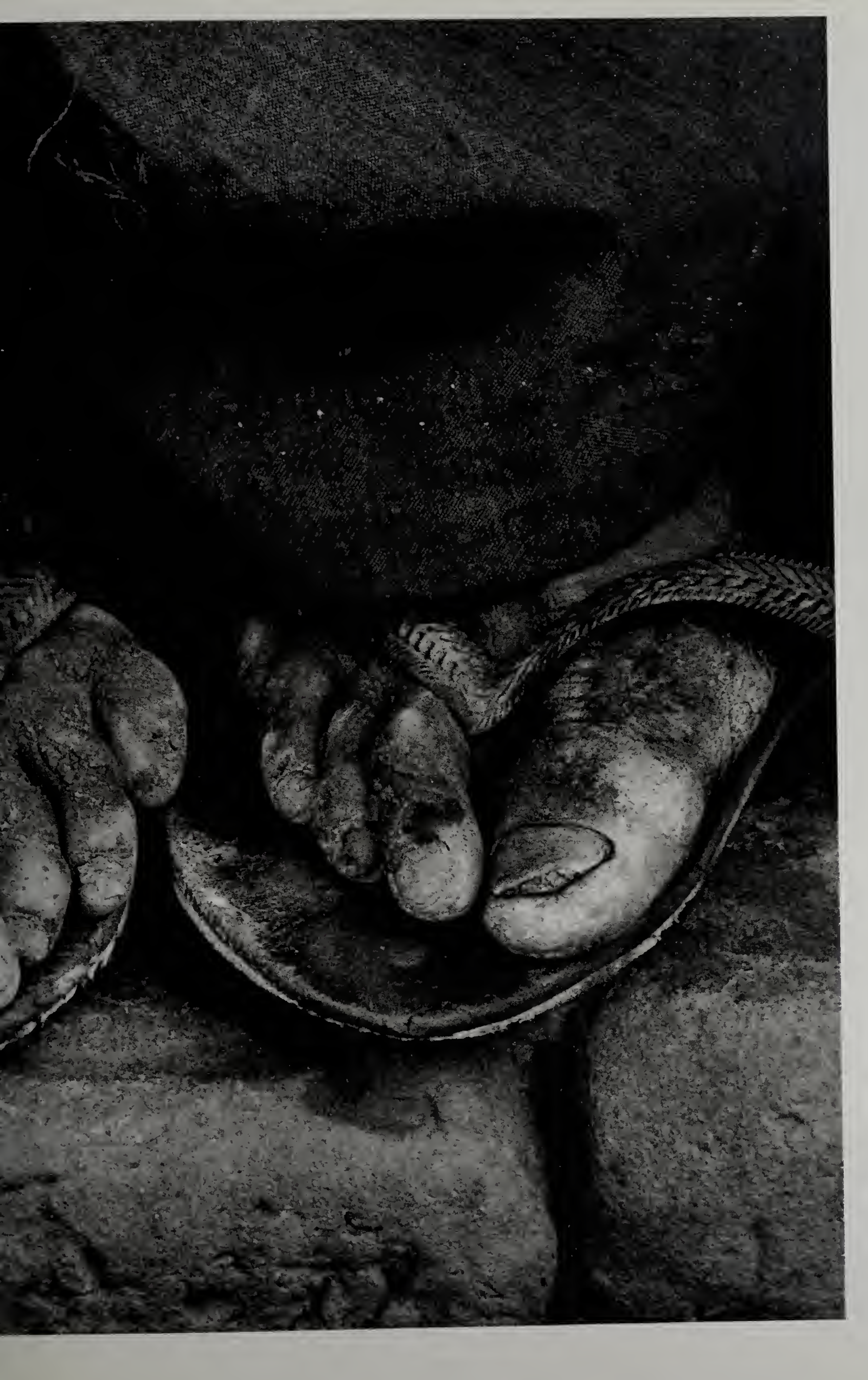
Brasil 1983



Mexico 1984







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Ecuador 1982







Mexico 1980

Peru 1977





Brasil 1980

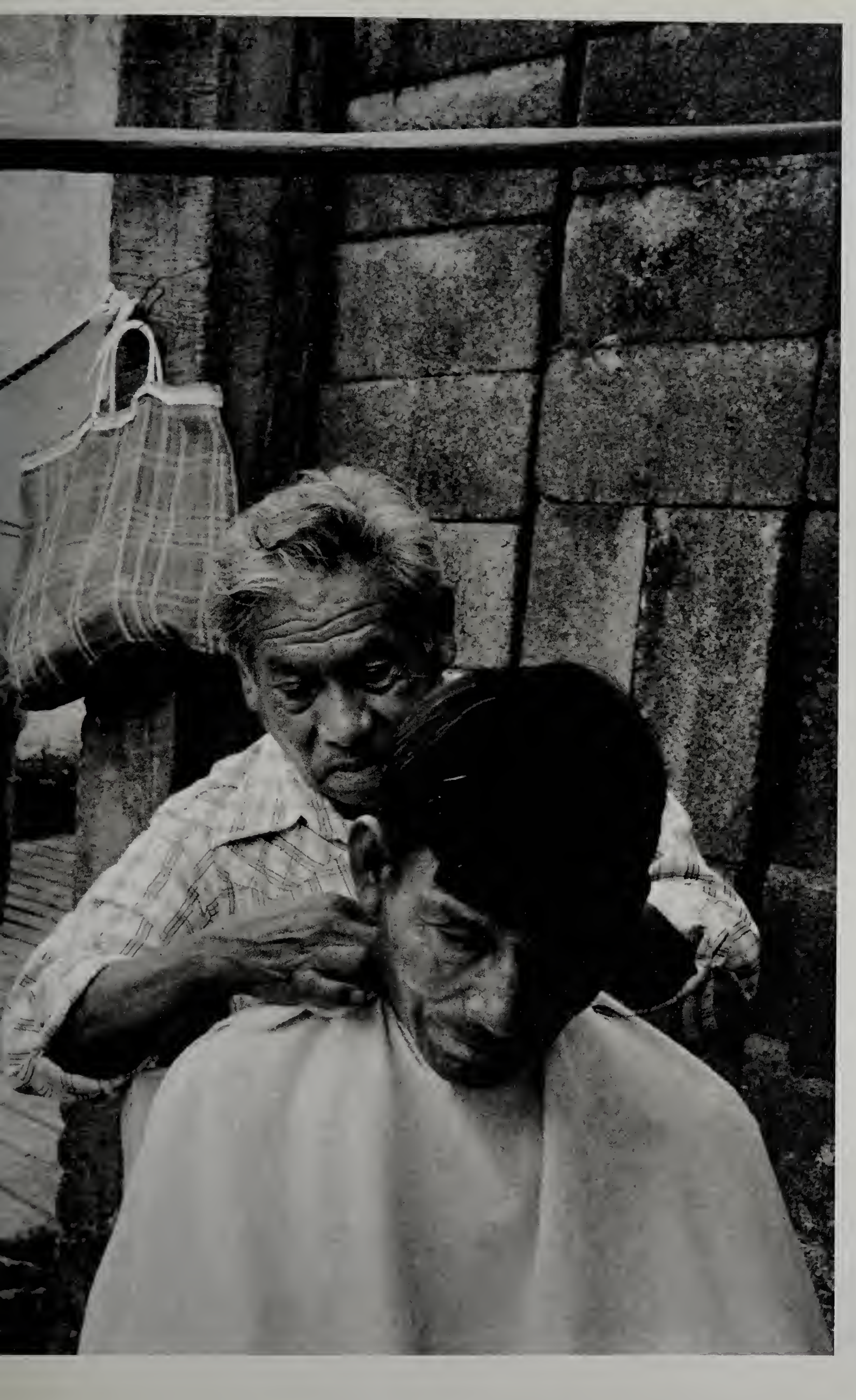




Brasil 1980







Mexico 1980





Bolivia 1983



Brasil 1981





Brasil 1981





Brasil 1980









Guatemala 1978





Ecuador 1982





Ecuador 1978





Mexico 1984

Bolivia 1983





Mexico 1980





Mexico 1980







Bolivia 1977





Brasil 1983



Ecuador 1982

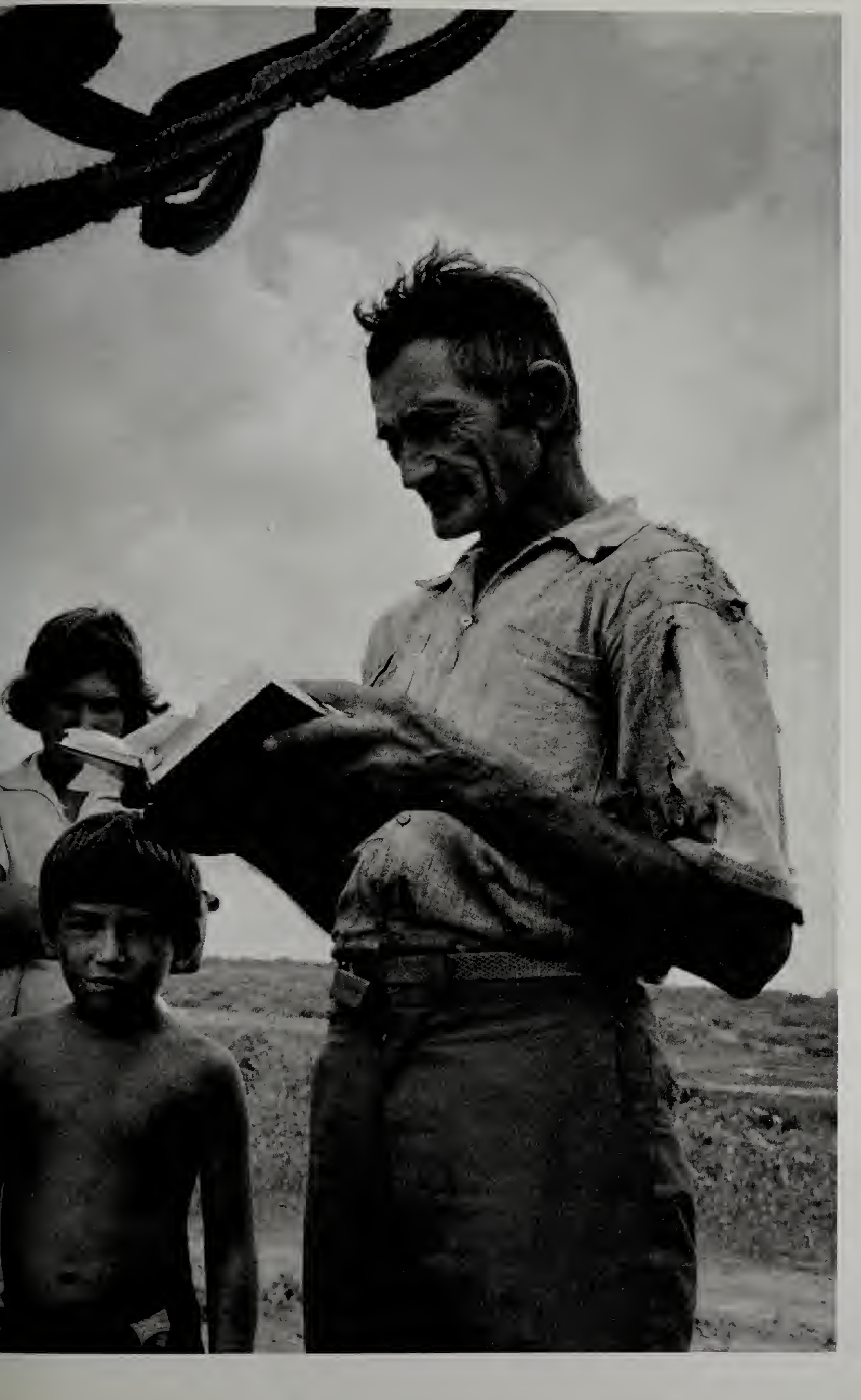




Brasil 1983



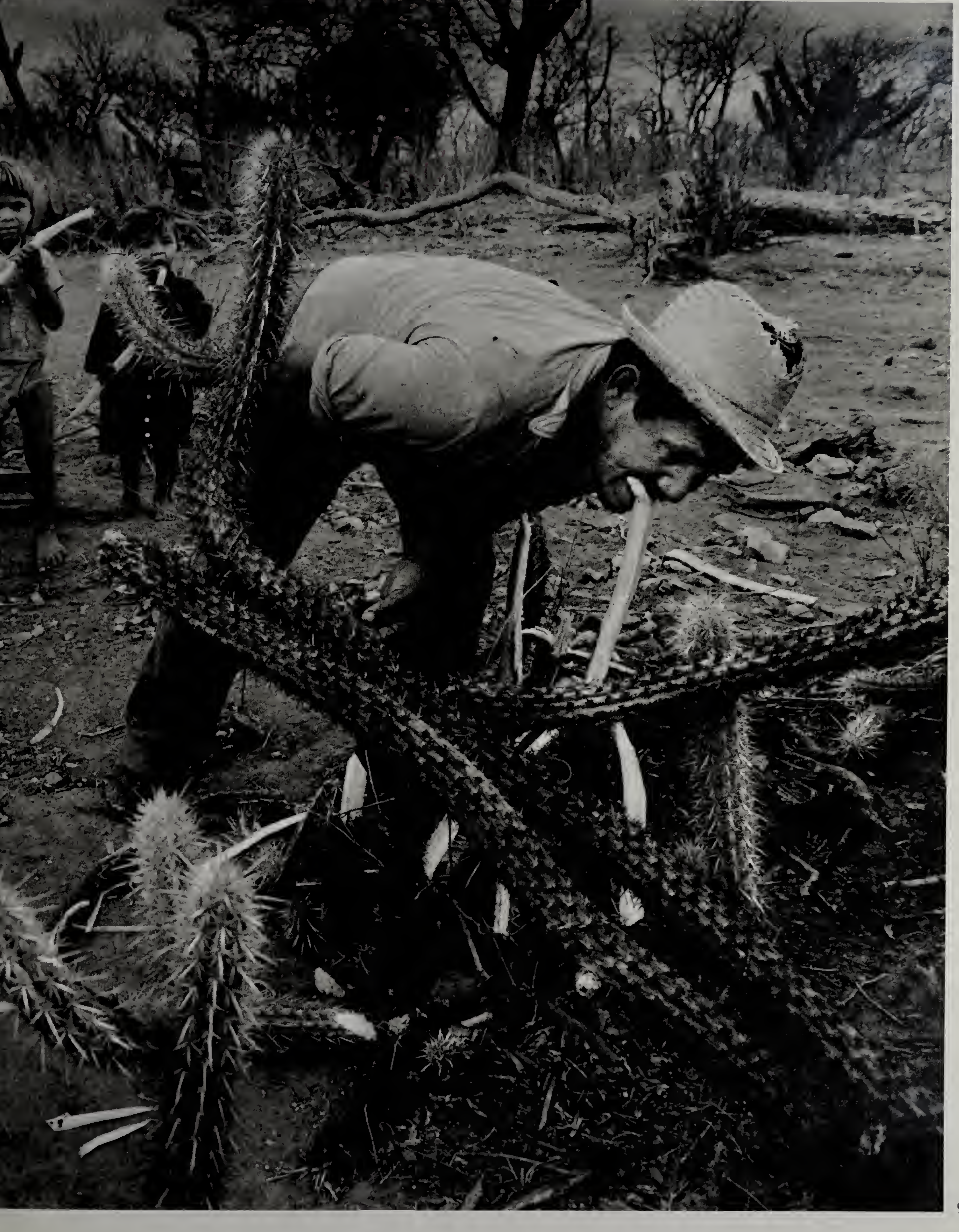




Brasil 1983



Brasil 1983



Peru 1977





Ecuador 1982



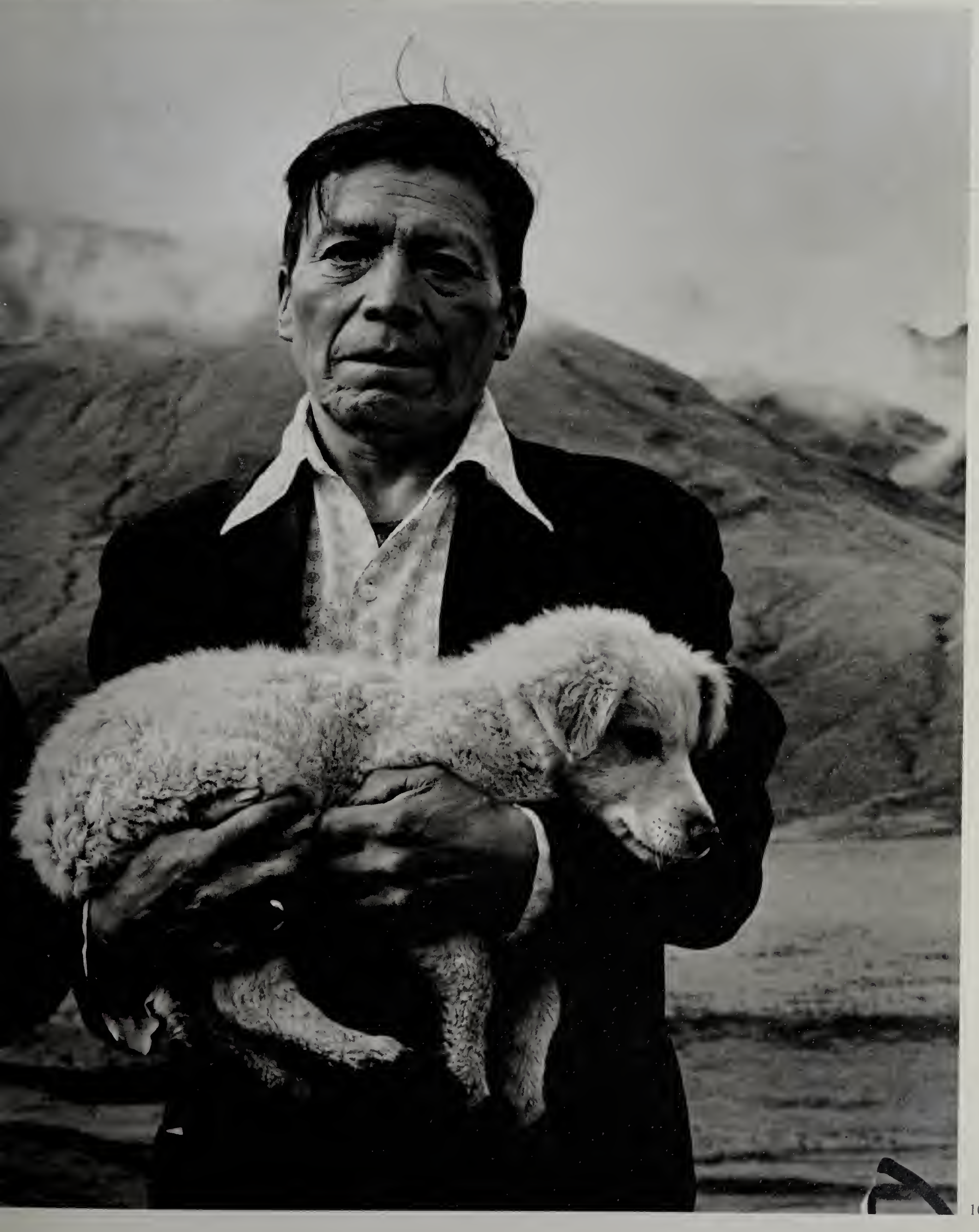


Ecuador 1982





Ecuador 1982







Mexico 1980



Ecuador 1982



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From one of the most versatile and outstanding in the new generation of photojournalists comes this riveting and timeless collection of photographs of the "other" side of Latin America, the visual equivalent of the magic of a Gabriel García Márquez tale.

Sebastião Salgado spent seven years traveling through South and Central America, living among and documenting the peasants, to bring us this extraordinary collection of his work from six different countries: Brazil, Mexico, Ecuador, Peru, Bolivia, and Guatemala. Marked by a texture at once humble and reverent, which captures both the simplicity of the daily task and the sheer weight of history, these stunning portraits of everyday life evoke a rich variety of responses—from compassion and regret to curiosity, hope for resurrection, and the mere fact of longing. As such they are a testimony to the unparalleled vision and integrity of one of the finest photographers working today.

If Sebastião Salgado has earned any label, it is that of the "concerned photographer." A humanist who renounces any dubious claim to objectivity and neutrality, his photographs are full of conscience as well as beauty. The images—poignant and barren, mystical, and at once specific and universal—are of morning masses and funerary rites; saintly old men and grave young children; dewy-eyed visions of Christ and wizened, ragged faces of the people; chiaroscuro silhouettes and textures that are dry, cracked, ravaged. We see a gauze-protected coffin at a wake, and then a baby cradle filled with fresh flowers; the unemotional wedding day of a stern young woman, and vultures and social class division at a local garbage dump; the eternity of train tracks against an open sky, and the regularity and recurrence of indolent afternoons amidst burnt, parched landscapes. In these photographs Salgado has indeed recovered for us the enchanted, mystical, and ghost-ridden aspect of the daily lives of these people—the "inseparable sister" of the political life with which we have become all too familiar.

Born in Brazil in 1944, Sebastião Salgado was trained as an economist, and served in the Brazilian Ministry of Finance and as economic adviser to many international organizations before giving up his distinguished career to devote himself exclusively to photography. He joined Magnum Photos in 1980 and has been an associate member since 1981. In 1982 he received the W. Eugene Smith Memorial Award for his outstanding essay and series "Ethiopian Famine," and in 1985 won the Oskar Barnack Award. He lives with his wife and children in Paris.

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